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# HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Alice Shepard Gilman, R.N., Department Editor

[The following article contains a new idea for the preliminary student and one which, if the result is successful, is of vital importance to the administrator of the school. The demerit system has been given a trial in one school of nursing and we present the subject hoping that the idea which it embodies may be of value to others.]

## THE DEMERIT SYSTEM

By Mabel E. Hoffman, R.N.

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The preliminary students of the Rochester General Hospital had, for the first time in the history of the school, the privilege of working under an honor and a demerit system during the first three months of their training. It was indeed an experiment, for the instructors as well as the students, but it proved to be of such value that everyone felt that the time, energy and thought given to working out such a system, had been well spent.

The spirit that was created through friendly competition among the probationers was indeed inspiring, and it seemed for those three months, that a new stimulus had been added to the training of these young women. As this was the first attempt to work with a demerit system in the training of the nurse, it can only be hoped that the many mistakes that we have made, and the attempts to improve our system, will be of real value to anyone who makes a similar attempt.

The question immediately arises, Why did we start such a system? The answer is, that by its use, we hoped to stimulate a greater interest in theoretical and practical work, and to encourage the students to keep up their interest and enthusiasm during the three months, which time so often becomes rather tiresome and long before it expires. The enthusiasm which the nurses manifested in this new plan, and the manner in which it was carried through, were indeed most gratifying to all concerned. There was considerable interest and curiosity aroused in our midst, as we simply attempted this with our hopes high, and gave little thought to the obstacles that were sure to arise, but we assured ourselves that we would meet them as they came.

In planning this system we did not strive to bind the students down by innumerable "do's" and "don'ts," but aimed principally to place before them certain stipulations that needed to be heeded each day of their training as pupils, in order to keep up the even and

unmarred finish which so often is lacking. The requirements made in the outline were such that every student nurse could be held up to the same principles. Nothing was there that was not needed in the discipline of a student nurse, and were we to adopt such a plan in our schools, I am sure they would have a higher standard and there would be elimination of some of the criticisms that we constantly hear. It is nothing more nor less than a constant checking up of the students in their work and conduct, keeping before them the necessity for such measures and making each one feel her part in making this plan a success.

As with every other system that calls for competition, we arranged to have a reward of merit given to the student or students holding the highest average in Theory, Practice and Ward work, who had also escaped any demerit marks during the term of three months. Little did we appreciate at the time we planned this, the tremendous amount of work it would necessitate in order to have no partiality shown and have the right person or persons rewarded for their fitness.

The system consisted of outlining eight different prerequisites, the failure to carry out such, warranting a demerit mark. The plan was explained fully in detail to the students at the time of entrance and they realized what their responsibility would be in order to have this a success. At the end of every week the marks were posted on a large card on the bulletin board in the Nurses' Home. Here the older nurses were able to follow the students' work and conduct, thereby giving them some idea of their progress in the school. The student receiving two or three demerit marks during the week was without a doubt the student doing poor work on the wards and in class, while the nurse having empty spaces after her name was one of the best. It was most interesting to observe the effect of a demerit mark upon the student's peace of mind. I have had pupils come to me and say that they dreaded to have the rest of the school know that they had an untidy room or that they had been discourteous to a visitor on the ward. They strived to live up to the highest mark in order to be among the honor students. This was not only true in such conditions as the above, but it proved to be of the same value in their class work. Their lesson assignments were always prepared before class and if not, a very good explanation was necessary in order to avoid a demerit mark. Their personal appearance, which is so essential in the nurse, was emphasized. Uniform inspection was held at least twice a week, either inspecting them as a group or taking them individually, when they were least aware of it. Our one aim was to enforce these stipulations so rigidly that everything would tend to become habitual

to them,—they liked to wear clean aprons, they enjoyed tidy rooms, they realized the advantage of keeping up the lesson assignments, and the desirability of courtesy to graduate nurses.

When the marks were finally assembled, there were eight students whose marks were above 90 per cent and these were listed as honor students. From this group of eight, we chose three who seemed to stand out as the very best prepared in all respects for the nursing profession. Two of the students so honored were given prizes. It was regretted that the remainder of the class could not have been given something as a token of appreciation for their efforts and the successful completion of their preliminary term.

The day on which the students received their caps, they held class-day exercises and had as their guests their parents and friends. The exercises were held in the Nurses' Home and the programme consisted of musical and dance numbers, reading of the class history, class prophecy, singing of class song and the welcoming of the class into the school proper. In the afternoon the class held a picnic at the lake and to this also they invited their friends. It proved to be a very enjoyable occasion and seemed a fitting climax for such a busy day.

Some one may say that the social side in the students' life is over emphasized, that the students forget their real mission and that they should settle down to the practical side and apply themselves to their work and to their studies. True it is that the social side *may* be stressed too much, but what we aim to do and what every school should aim to do, is to have an even balance between the two, and make the hard work on the ward become an appetizer for the recreation that follows. We can hold the students on the ward to the detailed and difficult procedures and get good results, even though we allow a goodly amount of recreation, so long as we do it in the right way.

So far we have shown the value of such a scheme; now let us turn to some of the improvements that we can make in the outline, having learned by experience some of the faults and some new suggestions that we may include in the future.

First, each student should have a typewritten copy of the demerit system, with each one of the prerequisites in printed form. This would serve as a daily reminder and would give each one a keener personal interest.

Second, instead of having each offense count as one demerit mark, we should increase the number of marks for various offences according to their grossness. For example, failure to be present at morning chapel would warrant one demerit mark, while being discourteous to a head nurse would give five demerit marks, and so on.

This would tend to create a greater amount of competition and also would make a distinction between minor and major offences.

It is hoped that any one who tries such a scheme in her school, will contribute to the cause and perhaps in the future we will have a system that will be invaluable in the training of the preliminary students.

The chart used in our school was ruled in columns on a single sheet. The headings of the columns were as follows, the numbers indicating the number of demerits finally adopted: Tardiness at Classes without Sufficient Reason, 2; Repeated Failure to Have Lesson Assignments, 3; Absence from Morning Chapel, 1; Untidy Appearance of Pupil's Room, 4; Untidy Personal Appearance, 4; Unsatisfactory Conduct of Pupil while on or off Duty, 10; Lack of courtesy to Physicians, Graduates, Pupil Nurses, Patients, Visitors, or Classmates, 5; General Attitude toward Work and Associates, 8. At the left hand side of the sheet, from top to bottom, were the students' names.

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#### HOW DOCTORS MAY BEST HELP RELIEVE THE SHORTAGE OF NURSES

"If every physician in the state will look his responsibilities in this matter squarely in the face and attempt to get one of the best educated, best bred and most capable women in his county interested in nursing right away, he will be performing a great public service."—From the *Kentucky Medical Journal*.

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#### FROM THE FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE CALENDAR

"In dwelling upon the vital importance of *sound* observation, it must never be lost sight of what observation is for. It is not for the sake of piling up miscellaneous information or curious facts, but for the sake of saving life and increasing health and comfort."

"Let no one ever depend upon fumigations, 'disinfectants,' and the like, for purifying the air. The offensive thing, not its smell, must be removed. I wish all disinfecting fluids invented made such an 'abominable smell' that they forced you to open the windows and to admit fresh air. That would be a useful invention."